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A SOLUTION OF THE GORGON MYTH.

*(Read before the Folk-Lore Society at their Meeting of
December 10th, 1902).*

BY F. T. ELWORTHY, F.S.A.

Is it possible that anything can be said upon this old-world subject, that has not been already considered and well thrashed out over and over again? Such will doubtless be the first thought of any cultivated man upon reading the title of this paper, and it is with much diffidence that I venture to attempt to advance anything as new, before so critical and learned an audience as the members of this Society. In justice to myself, and to disarm the charge of priggish presumption, I may say that I mentioned to more than one of our members, and especially to Mr. Hartland, who has made the Legend of Perseus his peculiar study, the main thesis I have to lay before you. Had it not been that he and others pronounced it to be quite a novel idea, I should not have been bold enough to suppose that I could have anything fresh to communicate.

Respecting the story of Perseus as told by ancient authors, I shall not pretend to interpret the many versions of his famous exploit in the long list of classic and other writers who have narrated or referred to it. It is, however, a matter of experience that of all the stories and myths of antiquity, that of the Gorgon and her fateful glance is one of the most frequently depicted, if not the most common, of all the subjects of ancient art and traditional folklore.

It has been held, and in my judgment it has been demonstrated, by Dr. Haddon¹ and Mr. Balfour,² that all

¹ *Evolution in Art*, by A. C. Haddon, 1895 (Walter Scott).

² *Evolution of Decorative Art*, by H. Balfour, 1893 (Rivingtons).



FIG. 1.
ARMS OF SICILY.

patterns and decorative ornaments had their origin in some concrete object, of which the pattern or ornament is a pictorial evolution. In the same way, I venture to assert that every myth that has taken such firm hold, and been evolved into so many phases and forms as that of the Gorgon, had originally, indeed must have had, some solid foundation in an actual occurrence with real living actors, though those actors were not necessarily human beings. For I contend that the modern fashion of calling every unexplained story, a nature or a sun-myth, has nothing substantial to be said for it, and is but a convenient way of getting over a difficulty or an inconsistency, of which the explanation is not readily at hand. Such indeed I believe to be the case with the story of the Gorgons; it is no sun-myth, but the development by imaginative people of a veritable fact.

I would first draw attention to the fact that in the more definite forms handed down to us by classic art as well as tradition, the area of the myth is circumscribed, and may be said to be almost limited to the basin of the Mediterranean. It has been well pointed out that "the localities where the myth exists are all warm areas, where also the Cephalopods are abundant, and it does not appear in cold areas, where these animals do not occur."¹ I am not aware that the story is to be found at all either among early Teutonic or Scandinavian races, nor, so far as my information goes, is there any present trace of it among the several races of the far East, though of course it appears plainly in India, and so must be considered to be distinctly Aryan. Another point to be noted is that in all the stories of the adventures of Perseus with the Gorgons, either the scene is laid by the sea, or we find that the approach to it is over sea; therefore, it may be assumed with certainty that it is in its essentials a sea-story. This contention is confirmed by the special mention of the countries where

¹ Edward Lovett (Letter to the author, dated December 15, 1902).

according to Six (*De Gorgone*, p. 3) similar species of representations are found. The remarkable part of his enumeration is that no land is named at all except islands and sea-coast places adjoining the Mediterranean.¹ I venture to suggest that some of the well-known developments with which we have to deal may be attributed to its having spread inland far from the familiar objects on the shore.

Let me now ask your attention to Fig. 2, which is from a sketch of a terra-cotta figure of the Gorgon now in the Kircherian Museum in Rome. This, and two others near it, are in rather low relief; the subject, represented slightly differing in treatment, is identical in all. They are all said to have been found in Apulia—that is, on the sea, in the neighbourhood of Taranto, the district then known as Magna Græcia. Alongside these, and belonging to the same locality, are several other reliefs, some damaged, but no two quite alike; of these Fig. 3 is a fair specimen.²



FIG. 2.

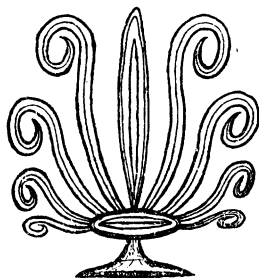


FIG. 3.

¹ It will not be overlooked that both the great exploits attributed to Perseus, the slaying of the dragon with the preservation of Andromeda, and the slaying of the Gorgon, have their scenes laid on the shore. Who can contend that both stories may not have had their origin in one and the same phenomenon?

² Here it should be remarked that Fig. 2, representing several identical reliefs, has ten arms or tentacles, five on each side of an upright spear-shaped projection. It has been suggested (Edward Lovett) that one pair of these arms is intended for horns, and that the central straight device "is an exact representation of the Belemnite, *i.e.* the 'Bone' of the fossil Cephalopods." Fig. 3 has but eight arms without horns, while the central object is like the bone of the common cuttle-fish.

Upon seeing these all grouped together, it at once occurred to me that here was the real solution of the Gorgon myth, and that in these curling objects we may recognise what must have been as familiar as they were dreadful to the ancients living on the coast; not snakes, but the writhing tentacles of the horrible Octopus, no other than the Hydra, so familiar in the story of Hercules. Those who have studied that monster, the Octopus, at close quarters, as I have, will find no difficulty in appreciating the awfully fascinating glance, in the baleful eye of that odious creature, an eye in itself conveying the most frightfully malignant expression of any living thing upon which I have ever looked. The swelling bladder-like lips of the gill-chamber opening and shutting as it breathes, with its beak-like mouth, need but little stretch of fancy among people who personified everything, to recognise in these features the hideous grinning face and protruded cleft tongue of the Gorgon. Indeed it may be suggested that this latter feature is the direct indication or outcome in ideal vision of the well-known cruel parrot-beak mandible of the Octopus. To some, looking down through the clear sea, the awful eye and distended mouth would be most in evidence, and hence, when at rest with its tentacles coiled up behind and around its body, the aspect of the hideous face thus made by the body of the creature would exercise its full influence upon an imaginative person, and so fascinate the beholder as to hold him motionless as a stone, just as serpents are said to fascinate birds. In ancient times these monsters of the deep may have claimed many a victim by thus stupefying, and, as it were, turning them to stone; at any rate, it is very probable that it was one of the greatest dangers to human life, with which dwellers by the sea were acquainted. For any fisher or swimmer round whom the fearful tentacles were coiled, was indeed beyond chance of escape. We read plenty of modern stories of the attacks of this monster even on people in boats. In the clear

waters of the Mediterranean adventures with it must have been frightfully familiar.

Those beholders who might be out of reach of the clutches of the sea-monster would see in the deep clear water only the horrible coiling, writhing, and outstretching suckers of the creature, and upon them these latter would naturally make the most vivid impression. Hence we can easily understand how a drawing or carving of the tentacles only, without the face, as in Fig. 3, would become, as an alternative with the grinning mask, a representation of the dreaded monster.

I am fully conscious of the great difficulty of conclusively proving this contention. The evidence I have been able to collect is disjointed and needs the support of chronological sequence. The fictile and pictorial representations of various ages have reflected the growth of the romance in popular fancy. Whereas in the earliest known forms the baleful visage was the very type of hideousness, and was held to work its maleficent effect upon the beholder by the fearfulness of its aspect, the original belief quickly became enlarged, and rapidly developed from time to time; so that even in early historic ages the idea had taken shape entirely in the opposite direction, and the effect of the fatal glance was thought by many to have been produced, not by fright, but by the loveliness, or, as we now express it, by the "fascination" of the facial expression. This later phase of the myth has been perpetuated and strongly emphasised in many of the later works of art; such as the famous Strozzi Medusa, the Romanini Medusa at Munich, or that in the Villa Ludovisi:¹ and yet the old belief in hideousness did not die out, but maintained itself alongside of the newer ideal beauty. In fact, the development of the representation of the Gorgon in art had to be accompanied by an enlargement of the story, so as to make it consistent. Hence arose the version that she was origin-

¹ See Dilthey, *Ann. Inst.* (1871), pp. 212, 238; Dennis, *Etruria*, ii., 439.



FIG. 96.
TERRA-COTTA FROM TARANTO.



FIG. 4.
POMPEIAN DOOR-HANDLES.

ally beautiful, but had been punished by the gods by being changed into frightful ugliness of face. Later, her hair developed into snakes. These statements can be supported by examination of a large number of Greek as well as later Roman examples to be found scattered through the museums of the world.

As a prophylactic charm against the Evil Eye, certainly no single object has ever had such a wonderful popularity as the Medusa's head. No other object has had anything like so many representations in all kinds of materials and in all kinds of places. Indeed the original myth, whence-soever its origin, brought by the immigrants to Magna Græcia, so established itself there, that in Pompeii, and even now in modern Italy, it is still the favourite and by far the commonest device upon the boss, to be seen on house-doors, round which the knocker swings. The notion is, as it has ever been, to provide an antidote to the first malignant glance; no place then could be so appropriate as the outside of the door of a house, where every visitor must inevitably first look upon it. The persistence of popular belief, even when the origin and meaning of the object preserving it have long since been forgotten, is shown by the fact that even here, in modern England, the commonest and cheapest form of door knocker sold in the ironmongers' shops is, like the Pompeian, a female face, but of cast iron, surrounded by a ring forming the knocker. How few people recognise in it the Gorgon's head! and realise that it is, like so many other familiar objects, a world wide protector against the fatal glance.

My first illustration is a photograph of four heads (Fig. 4, Plate VII.), once the ornaments of door-handles at Pompeii, of course of a late type. These are all of bronze, and now preserved at the Naples Museum. They are the undoubted prototypes of those sold to-day in our modern shops. They are no longer to be seen side by side at Naples, for the reason that the whole museum has been

rearranged. These four samples, although of the same period, are of the two different types already referred to. The outer ones are of the transition style, in which the face has passed quite out of the hideous, into the laughing, mocking kind; while at the same time it preserves traces of the archaic in the protruded tongue with indentation in the middle, indicating the split. The two faces between are fair examples of the Roman Medusa, and of that commonly seen as the product of the most modern foundries of to-day. All these heads are of course of approximately the same date, and show that at the time of Pompeii it was the fashion to give them *wings*; but it will be noticed that only the latest type shows here any sign of the conventional *snakes*, and I may state at once that very rarely have I found *snakes* upon heads retaining any remains of the grinning mouth or protruded tongue. Upon the Parthenon there is a Gorgon's head of somewhat archaic type, with snakes beneath the chin, not on the head; this remarkable exception indicates, as I think, that these snakes were an addition not found on older examples; and shows probably the very first, at any rate the earliest known, representation of what was even then a late development. It may be remarked that the representation of the hair developed into snakes can hardly be found in any early representation, say—before the time of Praxiteles. Moreover, on this exceptional example the snakes are not a development of the hair proper, but are beneath the chin. On this point we shall have more to say.

As I propose to work back from late to early examples, I have given the Pompeian heads as fair specimens of the Medusa of to-day, and I further draw attention to the modern arms of Sicily (Fig. 1, Plate VI.,) which show both wings and snakes.

One of the most exaggerated and fantastic forms of the snake development is that known as the Gnostic

Gorgon (Fig. 5). This is chiefly interesting as one of the earliest instances of the old Pagan legend appearing in a curiously Christian setting, and though an interesting fact, it has but a small place in our chain of evidence. Long before this, however, we find the snakes on the later Medusæ of the Etruscan tombs—where the Gorgoneion was by far the most frequent of decorations. Several such heads are to be seen on the sarcophagi of the



FIG. 5.

Volumni in their family tomb near Perugia, and in the Etruscan Museums of Perugia, Florence, Bologna, and the Vatican—I think also in the Louvre—but very rarely, I repeat, can snakes be found on the heads of the old Greek type. Several remarkable Medusæ are to be seen in the Museum of Perugia, showing diversities of a distinct kind. One terra-cotta upon a tomb is very curious, but divergent from both the types most commonly seen. The mouth wide open, is anything but of the grinning sort; the tongue is

not protruded, but the facial expression is fearful. The hair at the sides of the face is made to look like snakes writhing, while from the temples project wings ribbed like a dragon's. Two large locks of hair on the top of the head are twisted and arranged to look like spreading cow's horns, and are evidently so intended. A band fastened by a ring under the chin spreads out on either side. Another has a head with a knot under the chin, and wings on either side of



FIG. 6.

the pleasant looking face, suggesting the origin of modern winged cherub's heads. Moreover, although the hideous aspect had developed into the expression of expiring beauty so early as the time of Praxiteles, yet we find no more than a doubtful tendency to give a snake-like form to the head-gear until Roman and Etruscan times, at which period, as we have seen, the fashion had become fully developed, and so has remained down to our day.

On Fig. 6 I show what I call one of the *transition types* having the doubtful tendency, or beginning, to develop the

hair into snakes, while the face is anything but ugly. This is from a Greek pre-affix found at Taranto, and now in my own collection. It is one of those I had the honour of exhibiting to the Society of Antiquaries in 1898. These pre-affixes are all apparently of the same age, about 350 B.C.¹ I have another from the same place and of the same period, which I also exhibited, of the other type with the wide mouth, split tongue, and hair arranged in very short curls, of a peculiar twist which is quite conventional.

The Etruscan head, (Fig. 7,) from Chiusi² fairly represents the curls and general aspect of my second Tarantine Medusa.

The existence of two original Greek heads, both of a period so long anterior to Pompeii, proves conclusively that the two distinct types of feature existed in very early ages. Here I would specially call attention to the fact that all the Greek



Fig. 7.

Medusæ of old type, as well as the older Etruscan ones, have the hair arranged in crisp little curls, very much in the style of Fig. 7. Particularly is this to be seen on the pre-affix referred to in my possession, and on the famous Gorgon guarding the tomb of the Volumni at Perugia. It is also a distinct feature on the bronze Etruscan lamp, now in the museum at Cortona, of which I give a partial sketch (Fig. 8). I have dwelt particularly on the absence of snakes on the early Gorgons, for the reason that I have to show from whence that attribute is developed. In this Cortona lamp, too, I would direct attention to the border, in which are to be seen alternate sirens, *capi di bove*, sea-gods, and fish, with

¹ See *Horns of Honour*, pp. 61, et sq.

² See Dennis, *Etruria*, ii, p. 221.

water indicated by a wavy line, thus making the whole conclusively into a sea-story.¹

I have already alluded to the attribute of *Wings*, such as those on the Pompeian heads (Fig. 4, Plate VII.). These are also to be found very commonly on later Medusæ: compare the arms of Sicily (Plate VI.). At Perugia, and indeed in most museums where there are Roman or Etruscan Gorgons, wings will be found to be a common feature of the



FIG. 8.

later type. Long, however, before the wings grew, that is in the Greco-Roman times of Magna Græcia, we find the head to have been conspicuously ornamented with *Horns*, and these perhaps, though common enough, not appealing much to Roman æsthetic taste, were made to take the shape of wings. Just about the Pompeian period we find Roman Mercuries sometimes with wings and sometimes with horns on their heads. Further, on one of the Pompeian frescoes at

Naples, Mars is painted with a Greek helmet having the conventional large cockade, but on each side a stiff upright feather, giving much the appearance of horns.² We thus fix the development of the wings at from about 350 B.C. to about A.D.

Figs. 9, 9a, and 9b are from original Greek pre-affixes in my possession, in each of which may be noted a very obvious

¹ On this see further *Evil Eye*, p. 161 *et seq.*

² On this see *Horns of Honour*, pp. 5-6, Figs. 1 and 2, also p. 35.



FIG. 9.



FIG. 9a.

pair of horns, but more particularly, a face wearing a painful frowning expression, which though scarcely one of expiring beauty, is very like that of the two Pompeian bronze faces of this later type shown in Fig. 4.

Another of the same group of terra-cottas (Fig. 10) is of a different style—rather happy-looking, negroid in appearance, but still with prominent horns, yet on neither of them



FIG. 10.

is there any indication of snakes. A peculiarity of these horned pre-affixes is, that each of them has distinctly pointed ears—a very uncommon feature; and on this account some authorities to whom I have shown these rare antiques, consider them to be intended for Pan, and not for the Gorgon. At the same time, these authorities admit, that if it can be shown that unquestionable Medusa's heads are horned, there is no doubt of these being intended for her

and not for Pan. Apart from that peculiarity, I would again point to the remarkable expression of distress or agony (so unlike the Jovial Pan), so evident upon three of them and on the Pompeian bronzes, upon which I have sufficiently remarked elsewhere.¹ It should be remembered that these horned terra-cottas were found at Taranto, in Apulia, and it is a remarkable coincidence that upon many ancient vases found in the same district of Magna Græcia, probably of about the same age, 350 B.C.) are to be seen heads of unmistakable Medusæ very conspicuously horned, just as these are.

One example of these I show in the sketch (Fig. 11) from a large Apulian vase No. 1204 in the Naples Museum. The heads are on both sides of the handles, and there is no sort of doubt as to their being intended for Medusæ, nor of the pains taken to make the horns stand out very prominently, white upon a black ground. Moreover, this vase is by no means a solitary exception, for there are at least six others in the same room, of apparently the same age, and all with handles like these, distinctly and intentionally horned. The features depicted upon these Greco-Roman vases are of the same type as those on the pre-affixes, though inferior as works of art, and they are, too, believed to be contemporary, though these vase heads certainly incline somewhat to the earlier wide-mouthed form. There are also several unmistakable examples of later Roman times, among which, in the Doria Palace in Rome, is a bust of one of the Emperors, having on his breast the conspicuous representation of a Gorgon's head, very dis-



FIG. 11.

¹ Upon all these pre-affixes see *Horns of Honour*, p. 61 *et seq.*

tinctly horned ; and, moreover, it is of the early protruded split-tongued kind, clearly proving that the early Greek type was still considered the potent form, or it would hardly have been placed where it is, on the breast of a late Emperor.

In the Museum at Perugia is a terra-cotta head, said to be late Etruscan, of which the facial expression is of the same type as the Greek from Taranto, but it has even more of the horror-struck, agonised look. On this Etruscan head the horns are as distinct and as prominent as upon the pre-affixes. Later still, upon Roman cinerary urns of about the late Empire period, we find the same thing. At the Uffizi



FIG. 12.

Gallery in Florence is a small marble house-like box, which has contained charred remains. I show a sketch of the front in Fig. 12 and I think every beholder will admit this head to be intended for Medusa, and that it is horned. In the Museum at Palermo are two urns (Nos. 5057 and 6995) precisely similar, though of terra-cotta and inferior work, and two others in stone—all are from Chiusi. Also at the Kircherian Museum in Rome there is another marble urn having a front identical in all respects with this, showing the type to be a common one. I might produce many more examples, but I submit that the question of horns

is sufficiently demonstrated. In each of these urns the device is the same, a column and a tree on each side of the head. As to the meaning of these horns, their survival as very powerful prophylactics justifies the assumption that they were then, as now, used to strengthen or reinforce the power supposed to belong to the head of the Medusa.

I would remark *en passant* upon the remarkable appendages beneath the chin in this example, and also in the others above referred to. These are certainly not snakes; neither are they female hair, of which there is an abundance of the ordinary sort twisted, it may be, to indicate snakes. I ask attention to this particular as bearing on



FIG. 13.



FIG. 14.

my main thesis, and I submit they are intended to indicate a beard. Many illustrations of bearded Medusæ are given by Six,¹ proving the Gorgon to have been male as well as female. Of these I will at present only reproduce one example (Fig. 13) from Six, *De Gorgone*, Tab. I. In addition to the unmistakable beard, I ask attention to the no less instructive curls, which are anything but snake-like.

My next example (Fig. 14) is from a large terracotta plaque, measuring some 16 inches in diameter, now

¹ *Specimen literarium inaugurale de Gorgone*, &c., J. Six, 4to, Amstelodami, 1885.

in the Museum of Taranto. I possess a cast of this, from which my sketch is taken. (I possess a portion of another plaque rather smaller but very similar in character.) This terra-cotta is apparently of the same age as the pre-affixes, although the style of the mask is totally different from them. It confirms, however, what has before been reiterated — that the two distinct types of countenance co-existed at least as early as the Tarentine period. The little twirls or volutes above the brow are noticeable and peculiar, but it is not easy to decide whether they are intended to indicate curls of hair like

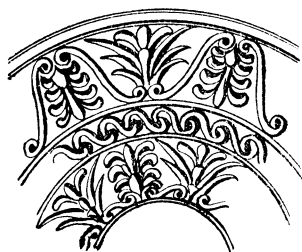


FIG. 15.

those on Fig. 7 or something else. The row of straight projections round the chin, after allowing for the difference in material between terra-cotta and sculptured marble, are analogous to the wavy objects shown upon the urn (Fig. 12). After careful comparison we see that, although some cen-

turies different in age, and although one is Greek and the other Roman, we must consider this similar appendage in both to represent the same idea, whatever that may have been; I think it is meant for a beard, as much as in Fig. 13.

This plaque is of especial interest from the style of the ornament surrounding the central head. The border consists of a wreath of the well-known Anthemion and Acroterion alternately disposed. These latter, however, are much more distinctly shown upon another disc now at Taranto, of which also I possess a cast (Fig. 15).

I desire particularly to draw attention to the method by which in this very beautiful ancient pattern, still surviving as a modern ornament, the conventional figures in the design are connected by a scroll of the same kind both

in the outer and inner rings, in which are repeated the same devices with slight variations. In my opinion this scroll forms a very essential part of the pattern, and I call special attention to it, inasmuch as it completes the interpretation of the entire design; for I venture to repeat what was stated at the beginning, that every pattern represents ultimately some definite object. I even believe that we have here the germ of the conventional scroll so common as an ornament upon Greek vases, in combination with other well-known devices that still hold their own as stock patterns in this twentieth



FIG. 16.

century. Of these I give a typical example from a vase in the Berlin Museum (Fig. 16).

Here we have a mere modification of the so-called Acroterion repeated over and over again as in Figs. 14 and 15, together with a modification of the scroll twining itself in all directions. It is easy to understand how the idea of the Acroterion was developed out of the twisting scroll of tentacles, as shown in those figures. We may thus readily perceive how it might become still more conventionalised as a decorative ornamental pattern, such as that I produce from Olympia (Fig. 17). But in every one of these ornaments we cannot fail to note the per-

sistence of the coiled-up scroll, as a sort of adjunct or demonstrant to the main design, as if it were intended to keep in mind the actual coiling and outstretching of the tentacles even after they had become conventionalised to the extent shown in the Olympian Acroterion. It is to this scroll, here contended to be the survival of the tentacles, that reference was made in describing Figs. 14 and 15.

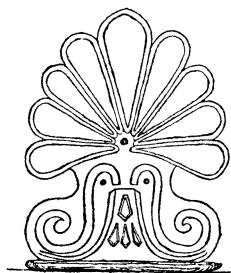


FIG. 17.

In the Museum at Palermo are portions of the frieze from the temple at Selinunte, of which I give a sketch (Fig. 18). This is of great interest and importance. Not only is the scroll retained to connect the same two devices alternately, but also in this the two remarkable eyes are reproduced in the same position in each repetition of the pattern, and above all, the Anthemion is developed into very distinct horns. One can

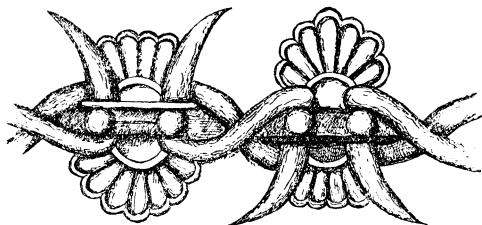


FIG. 18.

hardly fail to see that this design contains identically the same elements, with the eyes in addition, as that on the middle ring of the Tarentine plaque (Fig. 14.)¹ This pattern is also found on the contemporary temples at Girgenti.

¹ On the Acroterion and Lotus patterns at Selinunte. See Dörpfeldt *Terrakotten in Olympia und Selinunte*.

In the plates illustrating that very important work, the *De Gorgone* of Six, are abundant examples to support my conclusions, but of these I extract two or three only, while at the same time referring all who are interested to that remarkable collection and catalogue.

Fig. 19 is from Six (Tab. I.). This head he describes as having sixteen snakes, but here I venture to differ from him, and to maintain that these appendages surrounding the head are not intended for serpents of any kind, and, moreover, that they represent the same idea as the scroll. Under the chin of this Medusa we observe the same straight beard-like strokes which have been previously referred to. In very



FIG. 19.



FIG. 20.

many other heads we note the same thing, and I repeat confidently that their meaning as beards is to denote the Gorgon to be male as well as female. Besides the beard shown in a vast number of examples, like that of Fig. 12, from the Uffizi, we find in Six, on the same page as Figs. 13 and 19 (here shown), a very marked type of wide-mouthed, though beardless, Gorgon's head, winged, and mounted upon a human body and legs (Fig. 20). This form also is not uncommon. A somewhat similar figure upon human body and legs is shown in Dennis, *Etruria*, vol. ii., p. 318, upon a vase from Chiusi (Fig. 21.) Moreover, this figure of doubtful gender is conspicuously horned

and winged. A copy of this remarkable vase is in the Museum at Palermo. Upon this, called "the Anubis Vase,"

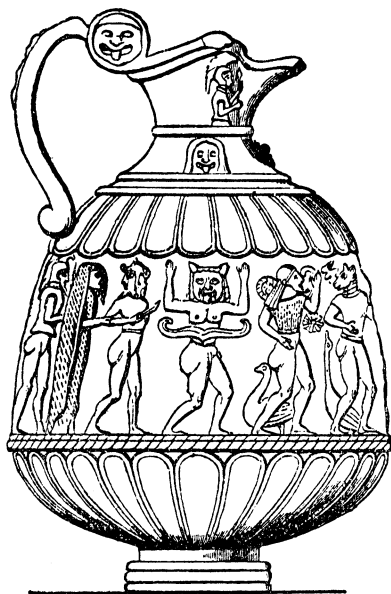


FIG. 21.

are to be noted also two other detached heads of the ordinary grinning type.

One of the panels from the great temple of Selinunte, now in the Palermo Museum, has a sculptured relief of large size—two human figures, representing the act of Perseus cutting off the Gorgon's head. Both figures are nude, and both standing. The Medusa is of the same height as Perseus, and apparently of the same sex. The face of the Medusa is of the archaic type. Moreover, we find

on many of the heads not only obvious snakes as well as beards, but also on the same heads that remarkable scroll



FIG. 22.

or volute, before noted ; all these Six has grouped under his Genus I. as belonging to the early type.

Fig. 22 is also taken from Six (Tab. III.), from a terra-cotta in the Bonn Museum ; it has a sort of nimbus, analogous to Fig. 19, and again it has what he calls sixteen snakes. There is nothing specially interesting in this head, which is of the later type, except

that these objects cannot be meant for snakes, as Six calls them. In this he does but follow unquestionably the received notion. It should be noticed here, that in this example, and in Fig. 19, the number of so-called snakes is exactly sixteen, precisely double of that in those first dealt with. This coincidence cannot be fortuitous, and must be considered as at least a link in the chain of evidence.

In conclusion, on comparing all these typical specimens, one can readily understand how all the various developments of the Medusa myth may have arisen in the course of ages. First, the hideous gaping face of the Octopus became personified, or took a human shape; then from an ideal ugliness it changed and grew into one of languishing beauty, the latter form being in harmony with the old-world belief in fascination. Next, the ideal hair of the original head grew from writhing tentacles into snakes, first appearing under the chin, and then upon the head; finally, the tentacles appear without the face, and as shown in the several examples from Selinunte and Taranto, they became treated as patterns of ornamental designs, until at last they grew into complete decorative objects, like the Acroterion from Olympia (Fig. 17).¹ When the origin of the entire myth had been lost or forgotten, when perhaps it had drifted away from the shore, and where no hideous sea monsters existed to keep it alive, it was natural enough that the snake-like tentacles should be represented as real snakes, and having taken that form in a firmly established convention of art, it was necessary to invent a story to account for them—a story to be found in the classic writers upon Mythology.

F. T. ELWORTHY.

POSTSCRIPT.—Since the reading of this paper, and the

The Anthemion in the patterns I have shown is supposed to be a development of the lotus flower, but whatever its origin, it is no less conventional than its companion device, and is in no way a necessary part of the present subject.

setting forth of my contention respecting the Octopus, I have come upon some unexpected evidence in the special region of the Gorgon myth, that in my judgment conclusively proves my hypothesis—that the original actors on which the myth is founded were an octopus and a lobster or crayfish, both of these creatures being transformed into beings more or less human. In the ancient sculpture from Selinunte, at Palermo, both Perseus and Medusa are depicted equally in human form. Such transformations are common in romance and folktales, so that there is no improbability to be accounted for. Indeed, there is a story almost analogous among our own Arthurian Legends. In the romance of *Le Beaus Desconus*, p. 66¹, the hero becomes petrified at

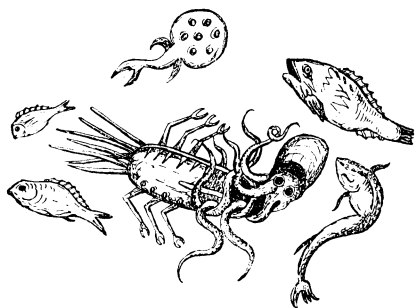


FIG. 23.

the sight of a worm with a woman's face, and thereby being compelled to submit to her embrace, the worm at once becomes disenchanted and retransformed into her woman's shape. There are variants of this story wherein the hero

usually kisses the monster, not she him. Usually also she is described as haunting a rocky coast. This romance or folk-myth is quite on all-fours with that of Perseus and the Gorgon. There is a Maori legend on the other hand of a woman being tempted by the *Manaia*.² There is also a legend of a bird in Brazil which petrified its beholders. To this I refer later.

But pursuing my method of proof by ocular demonstration rather than argument, I produce (Fig. 23) a drawing

¹ D. Nutt, 1902.

² Edge Partington, *Anthrop. Journal*, 1900, 40.

from a large mosaic from Pompeii in the Naples Museum. The combat here shown forms the centre of the picture, with fish of various kinds surrounding it, and speaks for itself. Fig. 24 is from another similar mosaic from Pompeii in the same room. This latter has been but recently exhibited, and when sketched, the room had only been re-opened to the public a very few days. It is on the whole in a much more perfect condition than the other (Fig. 23). Moreover, as this mosaic has not yet been photographed, I am able to offer this sketch as the first publication of it, and I can vouch for the general accuracy of the drawing.

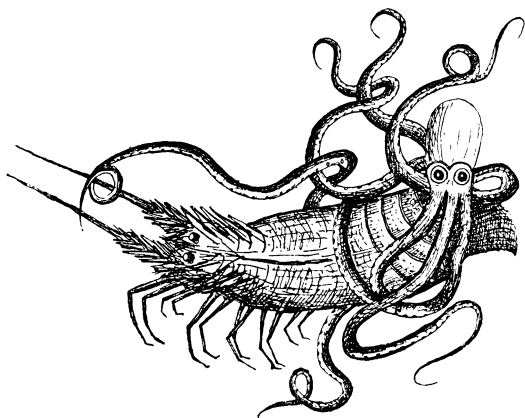


FIG. 24.

No candid reader will contest the value of this Pompeian evidence as to the then common belief in the antagonism of the crayfish family and the octopus. Indeed, this is a fact well known to naturalists of to-day. We read that "the enemy of the lobsters is the cuttle-fish, which crushes and eats it wherever it may be, even in its own holes in the rocks." (*Spectator*, July 27, 1901.)

Besides these two important scenes in mosaic there is in the room adjoining, a large fresco from Pompeii, numbered 9688, the greater part of which is in good condition. It

represents the body of a lobster, claws and all, but terminating, like a centaur, in the naked body of a man, armed with a sword and in the act of fighting. What he is fighting with is destroyed and a blank, but round the neck of the man, and coming from the destroyed portion, is the very distinct and unmistakeable tentacle of an octopus. This fresco, I submit, conclusively establishes what I have tried to prove—that Medusa was an octopus and Perseus a lobster.

There is, I believe, some evidence that “once upon a time” there was a great lobster in the Libyan Seas (the habitat, according to some classic authors, of the Gorgons) known as Perseus. Ælian associates a crustacean with Perseus (see Hartland’s *Legend of Perseus*, vol. iii., p. 154). Lucian also records that Perseus made use of the Medusa’s head to enable him to slay the dragon and to rescue Andromeda. The latter exploit is, of course, the origin of the story of St. George and the Dragon. Two reliefs representing this legend are known to myself, one in the Louvre and one in the Museum at Palermo. In both cases (of about the same date, seventeenth century), St. George is attacking a sea-monster, with a lady in the dress of the period (not nude) in a beseeching attitude upon a rock in the background. The lady in modern clothes can be no other than Andromeda, and St. George in plate-armour is Perseus. These two representations are apt object lessons in the growth and embellishment of old-world myths, and it is no part of my duty, nor is it possible, to reconcile the inconsistencies of the old story-tellers.

Although I have spoken of the Gorgon Myth as belonging to a limited area, I mentioned evidence of it as forthcoming from another hemisphere; and it is no less strange than true, that certain traits found in distant Polynesia and the West Coast of South America bear so strong a resemblance to the Old World Medusa, that with all diffidence I call attention to it, and suggest the possibility

that in the dim ages of antiquity they may have had ultimately a common origin, most likely by way of India and the Malay Archipelago. This is the deliberate opinion of General Forlong,¹ and even if evidence is wanting, the coincidence is so extraordinary as in itself to need study and explanation.

First, in Six (Tab. III., Fig. 9), is a Medusa's head from Layard's *Nineveh*, which at once strikes one as a precise representation of the typical goggle-eyed, gaping-mouthed idol of Polynesia. So evident is this, that except for the description by Six accompanying it, one would at once have taken it to be an ordinary modern South Sea god. Again, in the pottery of Peru we find heads bearing the special characteristics of the Medusa. Fig. 25 is from Wiener's *Perou*, p. 618.²

This is but one of several examples in which, not only is the mouth of the Gorgon type, but, I venture to suggest the tentacles also may be indicated by the scrolls on each side of the head. As evidence that these heads are not merely a fortuitous coincidence in the New World, we find also in Wiener's book crude representations of animals in bronze, almost identical with those found in ancient Etruria, such as may be seen at Bologna and in the Kircherian Museum (cf. *Evil Eye*, p. 145). At the Paris Exhibition of 1889 there was more than one horned idol from the South Seas bearing a singular likeness to the Old World Gorgon. I am even bold enough to suggest that in finding traces of the Gorgon Myth in distant Polynesia we have possibly found a solution of the much discussed myth of the New Zealand *Manaia*.



FIG. 25.

¹ See *Short Studies*, p. 122.

² See also *Evil Eye*, p. 166.

Maori traditions are well known to several writers. Captain Barclay¹ testifies to the persistence of their belief that their ancestors migrated from another land, "the mysterious Hawaiki"—that they have traditions of great earthquakes and other natural disturbances in that land whence their fathers came over the sea. They have many legends relating to ancient mythological incidents belonging to that land, such as of heroes transformed to demi-gods. The traditional route and origin of the migration are lost or forgotten; possibly these details are purposely withheld, yet in other respects they are strangely complete, "even to the names of the canoes and the (names of the) crews."

As to the route, Easter Island (Rapanui), at least 4,000 miles from New Zealand, suits all descriptions of the lost Hawaiki. It is volcanic and not coralline. It affords abundant evidence of a prehistoric civilisation; especially is this to be found among the debris of red volcanic rock, of identically the same kind as that of which a prehistoric image now in the Auckland Museum is made, which image is said by tradition to have come from Hawaiki. Easter Island must have been of much greater extent than at present, and we know not how much of it has subsided like other volcanic islands; but even on that which is left are remains of Cyclopean walls, and a number of heads of statues cut from single blocks are now lying about the beach. All these seem to represent the same person, or are at least the same type. That these are now on the beach is a striking proof of submergence. What may there not be beneath the waves? On these relics General Forlong² remarks: "For the most part, Malays liked a roving piratical life with safe ports on all coasts . . . and who but these clever Dravidian builders of *Ma-Māla-pura* could have reared the beautiful and massive cut stone structures of Easter Isle off the coast

¹ "A Mystery of the South Seas," *Pall Mall Magazine*, October, 1902, p. 211.

² *Short Studies in the Science of Comparative Religions*, 1897, p. 123.

of Peru? This they would easily reach . . . from isle to isle of the Polynesian groups; in this way also they must have reached the Californian coast, where we find the language of the Pinas to contain 15 per cent. of Malay words." The same writer traces the emigration of Indian Mālas to New Zealand, Australasia, and furthest Polynesia.

Much has been written upon the *Manaia* of New Zealand, described as a "mythical monster," and in identifying this with the frigate-bird Dr. Haddon kindly helps me with his great authority. "Assuming this identification to be correct, we have a further argument in favour of a Melanesian element in the population of New Zealand."¹

But notwithstanding the bill of the frigate-bird, I hope to show yet another explanation of the *Manaia*. It is curious that in Brazil is a belief in "a bird of evil eye which kills with a look. The ground under its nest is white with human bones. There is a myth that a hunter once killed one of these (birds) and cut off its head without the eye being turned upon him. He killed his game thereafter by turning the evil eye upon it. His wife, not dreaming of its destructive power, however, once turned it toward her husband and killed him, and then accidentally turned it toward herself and died."²

In Patagonia, on the Rio Negro, are graves which can only be Polynesian. "Maori stone implements" have been discovered at Cuzco, in Peru, and even east of the Andes in Argentina.³ Further, I have direct evidence from my relative the Bishop of Wellington as to the firm belief of the Maori people that their ancestors came from over the great sea, and of their having exterminated the people whom they found in the land. The mixture of conquering with the aboriginal race would account for all

¹ *Man*, 1901, p. 55.

² Dorman, *Primitive Superstitions*, p. 284. I am indebted to Mr. W. G. Black for this story. See *Notes and Queries*, August 24, 1895, p. 146.

³ Barclay, *op. cit.*

divergences of language and physique. But I submit that the evidence here produced renders it quite reasonable to point to the scrolls and gaping mouths on Peruvian pottery (see Fig. 25) as originating in the old-world myth on which so much has been said. I do not attempt to follow the wanderings of Malay rovers, but merely call attention to the fact that they can be traced to South America and to Easter Island, both at a greater distance from home than is New Zealand, where I venture to submit the Gorgon Myth was carried and still survives.

Mr. Edge Partington¹ says: "In sending me a photograph of a very ancient slab from a *Pataka* or storehouse, in the



FIG. 26.

Auckland Museum, Mr. J. Martin suggests that this particular way of depicting the *Manaia* is the genesis of the Maori scroll." Of this slab I give a representation (Fig. 26) from Plate E, and in asking close examination of it, again quote Dr. Haddon (*op. cit.*), "but the *manaias* which he figures appear to me as if they might very well be degraded and conventionalised representations of birds." To me, they appear representations of the whole story of which the mosaics in the Museum at Naples (Figs. 23 and 24) are but another version told in a more literal fashion. On this Maori carving the subject is twice repeated. We have the somewhat "degraded" human figure of the Medusa, split

¹ "On the Genesis of the Maori Scroll Pattern," *Anthropological Miscellanies*, 1900, p. 41.

tongue and all—compare it *en passant* with Figs. 20 and 21. The quasi-human figure is being attacked by another creature having a human arm with five fingers, but whose body and head may be anything. To me the head seems much “degraded,” but it suggests a lobster’s claw more than a bird, while the body has little of the bird in it, though even if we have here the “evil bird” of Brazil, we are merely shunted off into another version, another development of the old story. On Fig. 27 the same scene is repeated from the same Plate E, and over all, and pervading each, we see the scroll as the main, indeed the only



FIG. 27.

ornamentation. Which of the figures in these remarkable carvings is the true *Manaia* does not appear. I suggest that the scroll contains the true interpretation. In the great fight, legs and tentacles become so mixed as to seem each to belong to the other, so their memory has become traditional, and just as the tentacle scroll has become a long-lived conventional pattern in Greek art, so it has taken hold of the fancy of the Maori ancestors and developed into the prevailing decorative pattern in far-off New Zealand.

Lastly, I ask attention to the carved Maori staves in Pitt Rivers' collection.¹ Here the same scrolls are combined with eyes, as prominent as those in the old Greek carving at Selinunte (Fig. 18). Moreover these staves are tongue-

¹ See for illustration Balfour, *Evolution in Decorative Art*, p. 57.

shaped, "by far the most important part in the design." It may be well suggested that in these eyes and tongue surrounded by the scrolls are again enshrined the same all-pervading myth.

We have then a curious concatenation of evidence, so remarkable that few persons will venture to contend that the growth of an idea can have developed independently into the same general coincidence of legend among such widely separated people, as we are bound to admit now to exist, whether we name it the Manaia or Medusa. I confidently therefore maintain that the Old World story of the Gorgon and the New World Manaia are both the outcome of the same early experience of the antipathy of the lobster and the octopus, personified by imaginative and fanciful people into Perseus and the Gorgon.¹

F. T. E.

¹ I must add a line to record my deep obligation to Miss Burne for the pains bestowed, and valuable hints she has given in the arrangement of this paper.



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A Solution of the Gorgon Myth

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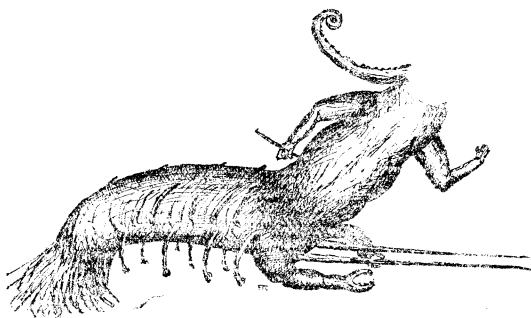
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CORRESPONDENCE.

A SOLUTION OF THE GORGON MYTH.

(Vol. xiv., 1903, p. 212 *sq.*)

I have recently had an opportunity of making a sketch of the fresco from Pompeii at the Naples Museum numbered 9688, and mentioned on p. 235 of the article above referred to. From the print herewith it will be seen that the description given in the text is fully borne out, and, as I think, it conclusively establishes my solution of the myth. Upon the same fresco, alongside the Perseo-lobster, is a sea cow with a long fish tail, of a greenish colour, completing the picture. The remarkable feature of the whole is that the lobster is rather larger than the cow swimming by its side.



Naples Museum, 9688.

Quite recently the papers have recorded the capture of an enormous lobster, so that there is no reason to reject the Pompeian fancy as anything more than poetic or artistic license.

I am also able to complete my illustrations by a sketch of the

group in the Palermo Museum from the Temple of Selinunte (see p. 232). This is probably the most ancient representation in existence of the exploit of Perseus. It is interesting to compare the Medusa in this relief, with that from six *De Gorgone* on p. 231—where the peculiarly shaped leg-scrolls of the Gorgon (Fig. 20) are nearly identical with those of the Perseus in the sketch herewith.



Palermo Museum.

At the Etruscan Museum at Florence is a terra-cotta having the face of a split-tongued Medusa of the type of Fig. 2, but instead of the tentacles shown on Figs. 2 and 3, there is mounted on the head as a part of it, an *Acroterion* almost identical with Fig. 17. Another specimen of the same kind is to be seen among the terra-cottas at the Louvre; indeed, much more evidence might be produced if it were necessary to further support that already provided.

The remarks on the Manaia (pp. 240-1) should lead to the examination of the Maori Feather-box illustrated in 'Man,' 1904, No. III. The gaping mouth and the scrolls are repeated on all sides, but on the bottom is the same nondescript pair of jaws, attacking the head, as depicted on Figs. 26, 27. Much also

has of late been written about Rapanui or Easter Island, but nothing specially to throw light on my suggestion. I would, however, ask for a careful and candid comparison of Fig. 27 with the representation here given of Perseus and Medusa from Selinunte.

F. T. ELWORTHY.

RIDDLE-STORY FROM THE WYE VALLEY.

(*Ante*, p. 178.)

"Gone a-hunting; and all the game he kills he leaves behind, and all as he doesn't kill he brings home alive."

The riddle recorded by Miss Eyre from the Wye Valley must be of venerable antiquity, as Homer himself is said to have "given it up." It is found in the *Homeric Epigrams*, a collection of odd scraps which are neither Homeric or epigrammatic; one or two of the poems (notably the Potter's Song and the Eiresione) are well-known to folk-lorists. The story is told in the Pseudo-Herodotean Life of Homer, with variants in other "lives" of Homer (the references are collected by Abel, *Homeric Hymns*, etc., p. 126 f.). In the course of his wanderings Homer met some fishermen, and on asking about their catch received the answer,

ὅσα' ἔλομεν, λιπόμεσθ'. ὅσα δ' οὐχ ἔλομεν, φερόμεσθα.

"We have left all we caught, and bring all we did not catch."

According to one version, which the Pseudo-Herodotean biographer is at pains to reject, Homer died of vexation at his failure to solve the riddle. It is difficult to suppose that the Wye Valley borrowed from Greece; and the riddle may well have been invented independently. Does it occur elsewhere?

E. E. SIKES.